

The Athena Project: Waterfront Athena 8

By Dave Nobles **



Sam Walton, the founder of the mega-corporation Wal-Mart, once said that the best ideas that the company had came from their stockboys and clerks. At The Athena Project, we believe that Sam was on to something.

This Friday, in sunny San Diego, California we're hosting the eighth installment of our waterfront pitch event at Societe Brewing Company at 1200. At Waterfront Athena 8, innovative Sailors from the San Diego area will be presenting powerful ideas and unique solutions to challenges facing the fleet, all in an open, casual environment. We hope that you'll

join us, and registration is still open to pitch ideas! Simply e-mail athenanavy@gmail.com for more information.

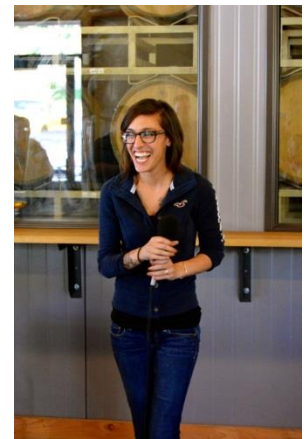
Some of you reading this may be new to The Athena Project, so here's a quick rundown of what we're all about, and how our waterfront pitch sessions work:

The Athena Project is an initiative, founded in the Surface Community, focused on harnessing deckplate innovations to create a cadre of forward-thinking, creatively confident Sailors for the Fleet of tomorrow. We create a platform for Sailors to pitch their big ideas to improve their command or the Navy in an open forum to fellow Sailors as well as leaders of industry, academia and government.



The waterfront pitch event is basically a [Shark Tank](#)-meets- [TED Talks](#) event that showcases deckplate ideas and innovations from the Fleet, giving Sailors a voice and connecting concepts with scientists and engineers from industry who may be able to help them come to life. Presenters are given five minutes to make their pitch – usually including the problem they've identified, a creative solution to remedy it, and a plan to make it happen. After that pitch, there's a five-minute question-and-answer session from the

Athenians in the crowd, who then vote on the ideas based on Idea Quality, Actionability and Presentation. At the end, we'll tally the votes and crown the winner of the [Admiral Sims](#) Award for Intellectual Courage – a title that earns Athena support to make the idea happen over the next quarter.



For pitches, prototypes and visuals (posters, pamphlets, etc.) are certainly encouraged, but the presenters don't use Powerpoint (gasp!), which allows them to focus on the purity of their concept and distill their idea down to the core.

You don't have to win to make your big idea happen, however! We've had several of our presenters' ideas earn funding and resources for prototyping. Our Athenians have worked side by side with innovators from industry and academia to make their ideas happen – from the University of Southern California Institute of Creative Technologies to Lockheed Martin to SPAWAR Systems Center Pacific, engineers and Sailors have partnered to prototype a slew of concepts. Most recently, six of our presenters from Waterfront Athena 6 and Waterfront Athena 7 have had their ideas picked up by Commander Naval Surface Forces (2) and the Office of Naval Research's Tech Solutions (4) on their journey to turn their solutions into realities.



By employing the Athena framework, the Navy can harvest ideas directly from the warfighters that deal with challenges first-hand. Through operational experience, Sailors generate unique solutions to complex problems. Further, presenting these concepts in an accessible forum builds Sailors' intellectual courage and inspires future ideation. Since the first Athena event, winning concepts have ranged from creative solutions that synthesize ships' onboard optical sensors for contact recognition to solving simple Damage Control problems for desmoking shipboard spaces. There is no challenge that's off limits at Waterfront Athena 8!



San Diego isn't the only regional chapter of Athena, either! If you're in Norfolk, we're hosting our second event in the Hampton Roads area in October, with more events coming soon in the Pacific Northwest, Mayport/Jacksonville and Japan! Contact us for more information if you want to get involved!

If you can't make it to the event, you can connect using social media! On Twitter, use #WaterfrontAthenaEight to connect or get in the conversation on the Facebook page!

And for anyone interested in pitching an idea or receiving more information about The Athena Project, just e-mail athenanavy@gmail.com or message us on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#) (@AthenaNavy).

Kick the tires and light the fires, innovators! We look forward to seeing you at Waterfront Athena 8!

Dave Nobles is a senior member of the technical staff on the Design Thinking Corps at Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Lab. The founder of The Athena Project, Dave is also a Navy Reservist with the Office of Naval Research.

** = The opinions expressed here are solely those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of the Navy, Department of Defense or the United States government.